

DEPARTMENT OF WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION OF WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS
ADMINISTRATOR'S MEMO SERIES

NOTICE 02-01

ISSUE DATE: 01/30/2002
DISPOSAL DATE: Ongoing

RE: Wisconsin Works (W-2)
Caseload Management

To: W-2 Agency Directors

From: Mary C. Rowin /s/
Deputy Division Administrator

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Administrator's Memo is to alert W-2 agencies to caseload fluctuations, reaffirm the principles of the W-2 program and remind agencies of the tools available to them as they work with low-income families.

BACKGROUND

The Department has been tracking an increase in the Wisconsin Works (W-2) cash assistance caseload, which began in March 2001. From March 2001 through November 2001, the cash assistance caseload increased by 1,859 cases from 6,669 cases to 8,528 cases. Due to this increase, the Department has undertaken a comprehensive review of trends in W-2 cash assistance caseload. For example:

- The new and returning caseload is rising more rapidly than the long-term caseload.
- The Milwaukee caseload is increasing at a faster rate than the caseload outside of Milwaukee. In fact, the caseload outside of Milwaukee actually declined in September and November.
- The largest growth was in the Community Service Job placement.

While we have seen increases in the unemployment rate and economic uncertainty, the growth in the W-2 caseload may also be impacted by factors other than economics, for example:

- A slow growth in the hardest to serve population;
- A training effort that resulted in more Custodial Parent of an Infant placements;

- The Employment Solutions, Inc. transition in Milwaukee as it ended its contract as a W-2 agency.

However, we do continue to see positive signs within our caseload trends, e.g., the rate of entered employments has remained consistent since March 2001 with an average of 756 per month; the average hourly wage is at its highest point since March 2001 at \$7.92; and, although new and returning cases are up, ongoing cases are decreasing compared to the total caseload. In addition, based on historical trends in our caseload and the assumption that the recession will end with a slow recovery, our analysis indicates that more than likely, we will see a natural decline in the caseload level by December 2003.

As the Department continues to track trends related to the caseload, it is essential that the W-2 agencies are using all tools available to them to properly manage their caseloads. As the state's contracted agencies to administer the W-2 program, W-2 agencies are on the frontlines of ensuring that Wisconsin's low-income families receive appropriate employment and training services and case management.

Below are some policy reiterations and general guidelines agencies should use to manage their caseloads and continue to assist families in preparing for and obtaining work.

GUIDELINES

Client choice and responsibility: During the application process, W-2 agencies may work with applicants to divert them to other resources available in the community that meet their needs. These individuals should be referred to resources available through the Job Center partners and the Children's Services Network. At a minimum, applicants should be provided with information regarding non-government resources, general financial planning, existing government programs and assistance with job search.

W-2 agencies should work with applicants to ensure that they are applying for other public assistance programs they may be eligible for, such as Unemployment Compensation, Veterans Benefits, Social Security, etc. To this end, W-2 has always recognized and encouraged the use of the work support programs such as food stamps, MA/BadgerCare, and child care.

Appropriate assessment, placement and engagement: The Department continues to place increased emphasis on the importance of appropriate assessment, placement and engagement in W-2 employment positions for all W-2 applicants and participants. Once an individual is appropriately assessed and placed, it is critical for agencies to ensure that case management is provided to help participants overcome barriers to move to unsubsidized employment.

For those individuals who have a recent work history, placement on the Unsubsidized Employment (UE) rung of the W-2 ladder in combination with job search assistance may be appropriate.

The Trial Job (TJ) placement, which has been underutilized, may be appropriate for many participants. Working with employers in your local areas to increase TJ placements may be a viable alternative to placing individuals in a Community Service Job (CSJ) or W-2 Transition (W-2 T). In addition to earning real wages, participants may be eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit and earn credit toward Social Security. In addition to working with local employers,

agencies should work with their current CSJ providers to explore the possibility of turning CSJ work slots into Trial Job placements.

CSJ placements should be reserved for those individuals who have little or no work history and lack the skills needed to gain or maintain employment. An emphasis should be placed on immediately engaging CSJ participants in work experience activities. Agencies should review their cases to ensure that all CSJ participants (prorated or full CSJ placements) are engaged in some level of work experience activities. The W-2 Placement & Activities Report (Form Name: C740; Report ID: *RP740A-WKC*) will assist agencies in monitoring appropriate assignment of W-2 activities.

Many of the W-2 Transitions participants may have pending Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applications, or an application for SSI may be appropriate. The SSI application and appeal process can be long, require a variety of forms, timelines, and documentation from many sources; that process can be difficult for applicants to follow through and complete. While SSI advocacy is an optional performance measure, we want to emphasize the importance of providing SSI advocacy services to W-2 participants during the initial SSI application process or as soon as the agency becomes aware that the W-2 participant is involved in the application process. (See Operations Memo 01-77 for more information on SSI advocacy services).

Once participants have moved to unsubsidized employment, follow-up case management and appropriate support program services are vital to helping families maintain employment and increase their self-sufficiency. W-2 agencies have a number of tools to help them with this effort including programs that focus on retention and advancement, such as Welfare to Work and Workforce Attachment and Advancement. Working with your local Workforce Development Boards is also important in making additional connections for employed individuals.

The Department will continue to collect critical data that is relevant to analyzing important trends in the caseload. As necessary, the Department will develop action plans for dealing with these trends. In addition, the Department will follow-up with individual W-2 agencies when discrepancies exist within their caseload growth. Until that time, focusing on the guidelines above will assist in ensuring that the W-2 agencies appropriately serve low income families and help them move to unsubsidized employment.

REGIONAL OFFICE CONTACT: Area Administrator